

Two programs hone writing skills

In the business world writing must be concise and strong. Now, two software programs are available to make your writing more forceful and effective.

The two programs take up where high school English teachers left off. They are RightWriter 3.0, which costs \$95, and Grammatik III for \$99.

Both get the job done, but I found Grammatik III easier to use. Features common to both programs include:

- Catch grammatical errors. Syntax violations include: subject-verb disagreements, improper use of possessives, incomplete sentences, improper article usage and split infinitives.

- Highlight proofreading errors. Sloppiness, which often slips by the human eye, might consist of erratic capitalization, improper punctuation and unbalanced parentheses.

- Suggest usage improvements. Alternatives are suggested for trite, hackneyed, pretentious or even sexist phrases.

- Generate summary reports.



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These reports view writing statistically, and you're given an equivalent reading grade level for your document. There are also figures on the total word count and average words per sentence,

and syllables per word.

One last area they share is the annoying habit of overlooking obvious mistakes and flagging the acceptable. This mainly reflects the problems of rule-based systems when dealing with something as capricious as English.

I found the greatest difference between the two programs was the way they presented their recommendations to the user.

RightWriter 3.0 tackles the whole document at once. It generates a "marked-up" copy of the original with all suggested changes

imbedded in the text. You go back to your word processor to make changes. Finally, you use RightWriter 3.0 again to remove all of its comments.

Grammatik III, on the other hand, offers a more interactive approach. Using its own editor, Grammatik III splits the screen into two boxes. The top box shows the suggested change in context, while the bottom one details the problem and offers advice such as "think twice before splitting an infinitive." When you've dealt with all the suggestions, you have an improved version of your text.

RightWriter 3.0 is quicker in producing its marked-up version, but requires more overall effort as you toggle between your word processor and the grammar checker.

I preferred how Grammatik III keeps you in its own environment. In addition, its on-line reference tells you such things as what a homonym is or the rules governing split infinitives. This feature gives it the edge as a teaching tool.

On the down side, they both

share a significant drawback: after you've struggled with them a few times, you have a significant disincentive to use them again. They're best for those occasional situations where you don't have the luxury of a human proof reader.

■ The bottom line: Both of these programs are suitable for a basic analysis of your documents. But both require a degree of patience and willingness to accept suggestions — a rare trait among executives.

Between the two I preferred the interactive approach of Grammatik III and its greater on-line reference.

RightWriter 3.0 is available from RightSoft, 4545 Samuel St., Sarasota, Fla. 34233; Grammatik III from Reference Software, 330 Townsend St., Suite 123, San Francisco 94107.

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